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ABSTRACT

While the financial survival of postsecondary institutions is being stressed, continuing education operations are facing increasing difficulties in surviving and competing. Strategies are needed for the significant survival of continuing education operations at the small college. The Lifelong Learning Center and others like it need to be concerned about the customer and service product dimensions. Three key strategies that will contribute to their survival are (1) providing staff development, (2) designing and using information systems, and (3) accessing and integrating research findings. The Center's staff development strategy involves college faculty, center teaching faculty, and center/college administrative staff. Development efforts are linked to staff competency evaluations. A second strategy advocates using system theory and computer technology in program management. A marketing information system based on macroenvironmental and microenvironmental data would substantially enhance the facility in program development, sales forecasting, and optimizing growth. The macroenvironment provides information on potential participants' needs, business and industry's training needs, the competitions' programs, and other relevant data. The microenvironment contains information about the populations the program has served and how the program served this group. The final strategy of research can involve not only information from ADELI and ERIC but also from the marketing field. (CSS)

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THE

STRATEGIES FOR SIGNIFICANT SURVIVAL

OF POSTSECONDARY CENTERS FOR

CONTINUING EDUCATION

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STRATEGIES FOR SIGNIFICANT SURVIVAL

An article in the April issue of Lifelong Learning, The Adult Years the AEA Journal by Robert Comfort entitled "A New Operating Milieu: The Buyer's Market" helped stimulate many of my remarks this morning. In this article, Comfort quite correctly identifies a fairly recent phenomenon which all of us in continuing education have been experiencing -- namely, increasing competition among post-secondary institutions for the adult student.

> "The adult part-time student still exists and in growing numbers. The future can still be as bright as it appeared several years ago. The buyers, the potential adult students, still await us, but we are facing a situation unfamiliar to our operating mind set. There are just more sellers..... A seller's market, never more. We are in a buyer's market with growing, real pressures upon each seller to gain a greater share of that market."

We in continuing education find ourselves in an interesting paradox. We are being asked to contribute to the financial survival of our respective post-secondary institutions while our own continuing education operations are facing increasing difficulties in surviving and competing. This morning I would like to address some strategies for the significant survival of continuing education operations at the small college and I have chosen the words "Strategies for Significant Survival" because given the demographics which are still so favorable to the increasing growth of continuing education. The survival of a continuing education program -- its breaking even financially seems feasible but significant survival will depend on strategies beyond the average.

The center for Lifelong Learning which I direct at an independent college south of Boston has three major roles. The center provides credit courses, professional continuing education courses, programs. seminars, and training opportunities, and personal development and enrichment programs. We are an independent cost center within the college and interface with all academic divisions and with many external publics including trustees, alumnae and community. We face strong competition from nearby community colleges. and large downtown colleges and universities.

For our small but growing center for Lifelong Learning and others like us, what will be the strategies for significant sirvoval?

It has become increasingly important to adapt a consumer orientation.

1. To be concerned about the customer -- who are the current students? Age, sex, place of residence, income, principal means of paying tuition, credits completed class time preferences attitudes about the program.
2. To be concerned about our service product dimensions --
   Quality of the program
   Assortment of offerings
   Location of offerings
   Time of offerings.

In addition to noting these customer and product concerns so vital to the continuing education operation, this morning I would like to discuss in detail three key strategies which I feel will relate to the significant survival of our center for Lifelong Learning. These are:

1. Developing staff including the development of the continuing education faculty as well as the development of the continuing education staff which designs, implements, and markets programs for adults:

2. Designing and using information systems to provide the Lifelong Learning program with the most comprehensive, descriptive, and accessible information possible; and
3. Accessing and integrating the most current research findings in adult education.

I. STAFF DEVELOPMENT

The most important investment a continuing education operation can make is in its staff -- and I mean that both in terms of teaching faculty and office and administrative help. We have used several strategies:

1. Relationships with faculty at the college --
   - Luncheon for faculty/staff development/training seminars for continuing education programs
   - Involvement in planning
2. Development of teaching faculty for the center
   - Evaluation of faculty
   - Monitoring
3. Development of administrative staff at the center and at the college.

Numberous competencies studies for an adult educator have been done. Grabowski (1976) after substantial review of the competencies in several studies distilled ten competencies which are common to most studies:

1. Understands and takes into account the motivation and participation patterns of adult learners.
2. Understands and provides for the needs of adult learners.
3. Versed in the theory and practice of adult learners.
4. Knows the community and its needs.

5. Knows how to use various methods and techniques of instruction.
6. Possesses communication skills including how to listen.
7. Knows where to locate and use education materials.
8. Has an open mind and allows adults to pursue their own interests.
9. Continues his or her own education.
10. Is able to evaluate and appraise a program.

We evaluate our faculty frequently in relation to these competencies and provide development opportunities in relation to them.

II. INFORMATION SYSTEMS

It is not the intention of the author to suggest that adult educators should become information systems managers or computer technicians, but that adult educators should consider the use of system theory and computer technology in program management. It is difficult to compare the information requirements of different continuing educators their diverse methods of program development and pricing, and their unique management styles. However, continuing education programs face several common problems, including;

1. Increasingly greater reporting requirements,
2. Growing requirements for program quality and accountability: and
3. Strong competition.

A MARKETING INFORMATION SYSTEM FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION

Increasingly, nonprofit organizations are recognizing the crucial importance of marketing. Continuing education programs are no exception. These programs which have been the stepchildren of regular divisions in colleges and universities added for the sole purpose of contributing revenues to the host institution are particularly concerned about marketing. Often these programs operate as independent cost centers and must demonstrate both cost-effectiveness and high quality courses.

Increasingly those programs are competing both for new "Product Lines" or educational programs and for new "Markets" or students. Self-supporting continuing education programs have needs not unlike corporations for forecasting potential new courses which are financially feasible. Rathmell notes that "Service. like goods. have life cycles. Undoubtedly, there are fads and fashionableness of service." The discussion of marketing information systems which follows is designed with self-supporting continuing education programs in mind.

A marketing information system would substantially enhance the continuing educators' facility in program development, sales forecasting, and optimizing growth. Philip Kotler notes:

> The crucial administrative steps of marketing planning and control cannot be carried out effectively unless the organization has developed an adequate and reliable base of marketing information...these and other nonprofit organizations need major amounts of information to plan their marketing activities. They need timely, accurate information as a basis for determining target markets and effective marketing mixes. (Marketing for nonprofit organizations)

Continuing educators have always been aware of the critical need for relevant information from diverse sources for purposes of program planning. The nature and organization of this information flow is more or less systematized, depending upon the program itself and the managers.

Quite frequently the information processed by program managers in program planning includes:

1. Previous courses offered by the program;
2. What the competition or other programs are doing;
3. Demographic information on the intended audience, such as age, sex, income level, educational background;
4. Emographic information on previous program participants:
5. Occupational outlook;
6. Current societal trends.

Peters and Boshier in considering program development in continuing education have summarized the following information sources:

> A useful starting point can be found by considering the motives, needs, interests, and expectations of potential clients: prevailing social forces: community characteristics: and the organization's purpose, philosophy, and structure.

The functional components of a marketing information system for continuing education would be the same as for any other information system. A determination of what information should be gathered from the macroenvironment and microenvironment to form the marketing research or intelligence data must be made. The information from the macroenvironment should include:

1. Demographic information on the potential pool of participants in the program drawn from the census and other numerous information sources;
2. Occupational outlook information, drawn from the U.S. Department of Labor, as well as occupational outlook information specific to the program's geographic area;
3. Information drawn from the help wanted ads in the newspaper to target the current growth employment areas;
4. Needs assessment or marketing survey questionnaires of professional business associations, professionals in the field to provide information on the particular training needs and requirements;
5. Brochures and program descriptions from other programs to provide information on what other continuing education programs, i.e., the competition, is doing.
6. Marketing surveys of potential participants in the continuing education program.

The internal record system of a continuing education program provides vital information on a specific subset of the microenvironment, the populations the program has already served and on how the program served this group. The information would include:

1. Program information - courses which were held, possibly courses which did not have sufficient enrollment to be held.
2. Student information - pertinent demographics on all students, courses in which the student is enrolled.

3. Financial information - information pertaining to income and expenses of the continuing education program stored by relevant line items,

It is crucial that the programs internal records be compiled in a disaggregate form; that is, information by course and by student, so that the greatest possible data analysis and manipulation is feasible. A marketing information system would have both a retrieval and display capability as well as calculation and analytic capabilities.

Reporting requirements for any marketing information system are best determined by the particular manager who will use the system, but listed below are several possibilities:

1. Reporting by course identifying the number of registrations, the tuition income, the expenditures.
2. Reporting by student profile identifying the number of students by city, age, sex, income level, course type, company or business.
3. Reporting financial statements, identifying profitability by course, by program, by advertising medium.

EXHIBIT I

Benefits Anticipated From a MIS

or

Information Uses Anticipated From a MIS

CONTROL

1. greater control over expenditures through more timely and improved reports.

2. diagnosis of poor response to particular courses and programs is more readily possible and particular variables may be examined for the reasons contributing to this poor response.

PLANNING

1. improved program planning and marketing segmentation through use of timely and accurate reports.

2. long-range planning for promotional efforts and budgeting. Additionally, changes in promotional or pricing strategy may be readily measured against sales.

FORECASTING RESEARCH

1. pricing strategies may be improved using simulation and alternative future models.

2. program planning may be enhanced by suggesting new directions based on information coming from both the macroenvironment and the internal records system.

III. RESEARCH APPLICATIONS

Increasing importance is being placed on linking research to practice in adult and continuing education. To help practitioners with making research findings more accessible, we have use of both Adell and Eric. More importantly too, investigators are beginning to undertake research on the more pragmatic problems identified by the field.

Dr. Marvin Lamoureux at Vancouver Community College has investigated two areas of concern to the practitioner:

1. An examination of course length vs. course price as marketing factors in program planning.
2. Threshold pricing theory as a strategy for the marketing of adult education courses.

It becomes increasingly important that continuing educators have access to research directly applied to practice.